
Changes in Pumpkin Seed Oil Production and Local Communities. Examples from the Hungarian-Slovenian Borderland

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Abstract: The present study examines the heritagization processes associated with pumpkin seed oil, a product typical of the Slovenian-Hungarian borderland, that have evolved since the 2000s in a settlement in the Őrség region of Hungary and a settlement in the Slovenian region of Goričko. The study explores how innovations — in our case, the introduction and spread of new varieties of pumpkin — have transformed seed oil processing technologies, and the impact that this transformation has had on the culture of the local communities. Both examples can be regarded as success stories in their own way, since the examined communities can be said to have taken ownership of, and “appropriated,” this aspect of their traditional culture in advance of other settlements in the same region by connecting and binding it to their own locality. Today, there can be no doubt that these two settlements have “earned the right” to be permanent representatives of this unique cultural heritage and to exploit the opportunities it offers.

Keywords: pumpkin seed oil, heritagization, borderland

Pumpkin seed oil is a typical agricultural product in the Hungarian-Slovenian borderland and plays an important role even today in the daily diet of the local population. Regardless of ethnic identity, the cultivation of the plant and the extraction of oil from its seeds are typical activities in this region — where, after meeting their own consumption needs, more and more people are endeavoring to make a living from oil production. As a food with medicinal properties¹, pumpkin seed oil is enjoying increasing popularity among the ever-growing numbers of tourists visiting the borderland area, who not only consume it as an accompaniment to local dishes, but also purchase it in significant quantities, thus providing a substantial source of revenue for entrepreneurs specializing in its production. Significant changes have taken place in recent decades in the cultivation of pumpkins and the production of pumpkin seed oil. These changes are connected, on the one hand,

¹ Due to the composition of its fatty acids and effects attributable to its other components, the consumption of pumpkin seed oil is beneficial for both men and women. In the case of men, it slows the progression of age-related prostatic hyperplasia, and in the case of both sexes it improves cholesterol levels. For details, see: BERÉNYI 2014:22–23; CSUPOR 2016.

to the introduction and spread of technological innovations, and on the other, to a radical transformation in lifestyles. For centuries, the plant played a versatile role in small-scale peasant farming, since pumpkins were used in both animal and human nutrition, and pumpkin oil was not only consumed but was also occasionally used for lighting and medicinal purposes. Pumpkins were grown not in a monoculture system, but together with other plants, such as corn or potatoes. Pumpkin processing, the removal of the seeds from the pumpkin flesh, the extraction of the seeds from their husks, and the production of oil were all extremely demanding in terms of manual labor — not to mention the fact that certain phases of the work typically required cooperation between households.

The present study aimed to examine the impact of innovations – in our case, the introduction of new pumpkin varieties — on the culture of the local communities, beyond the transformation of cultivation and processing technologies. How did these communities respond to the changes? Using a Hungarian and a Slovenian example, my aim was to show why, following the discontinuation of the agricultural cooperation earlier associated with pumpkin seed hulling, local politicians or leaders of cultural associations in certain settlements considered it important to invent this “tradition” in an entirely new framework — or, in other words, why they shaped this aspect of their traditional culture as cultural heritage. How were these strongly cooperative, activity-based communities transformed into features of festivals or local celebrations?

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

Since the production and consumption of pumpkin seed oil is peculiar to the southwestern region of Hungary, the most detailed ethnographical descriptions originate from this area. Among the most comprehensive documents concerning the cultivation of pumpkins and the extraction of their oil is that written by Ágoston Pável, who explored the topic in meticulous detail on several occasions. Using the example of the settlement of Szalafő in the Őrség region, he demonstrated the important role played by this plant in the agriculture and alimentation of the local population, and how peasant households endeavored to utilize it in a wide variety of ways (PÁVEL 1949:139–154). In his monograph on popular nutrition in the Őrség region, László Kardos included a detailed description of foods made using pumpkin seed oil that were consumed in this geographical area, and which were essential elements of the food culture (KARDOS 1943:267). In her dictionary of ethnography, Mária Mukicsné Kozár devotes a separate entry to pumpkin seed oil, which continues to enjoy huge popularity today among the Slovenian minority in Hungary (MUKICSNÉ KOZÁR 1996:24). In 1993, Attila Selmeczi-Kovács published a monograph in which he summarized ethnographical data related to oleaginous plants in Hungary (SELMECZI-KOVÁCS 1993). Even today, it can still be regarded as the most exhaustive work on this topic, addressing in detail the practice of pumpkin cultivation in Hungary and the extraction of oil from the seeds of the plant. A considerable contribution to our examination of this topic, and to the comparison of the situation on the two sides of the border, was the inclusion in our research team of Maja Godina, an outstanding expert in the field of food culture, who has published the results of field research carried out in Slovenian settlements in several English-language studies (GODINA 2017:373–388; 2019:117–135). She has undertaken research not only in the

Slovenian-Hungarian borderland, but also in other regions, such as Slovenian (Lower) Styria (Slovenska Štajerska). Based on her analysis, we were able to piece together a picture of how pumpkin seed oil became part of Slovenian nutritional culture and Slovenia's intangible cultural heritage, despite the fact that its popularity had earlier been limited exclusively to the northeastern part of the country (GODINA 2017:384).

THE LOCATIONS, METHODOLOGY, AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

Research on this topic has been carried out with varying degrees of intensity in the Prekmurje region of Slovenia (Muravidék in Hungarian) for approximately 10 years, focusing primarily on identifying the role of the pumpkin, and of the oil produced from its seeds, in traditional peasant culture. In several settlements, I had the opportunity to interview people of Hungarian nationality, to observe the work processes necessary for pumpkin cultivation and processing on small-scale farms, and to study the place of pumpkin seed oil in daily nutrition. With rigorous attention to the criteria of applied ethnography, the goal of the research work was the compilation of a publication aimed primarily at familiarizing a wider readership with the traditional gastronomic uses of pumpkin seed oil.

In the framework of the project “Protected areas along the Slovenian-Hungarian border. The challenges of cooperation and sustainable development” (National Research, Development and Innovation Office, award number SNN 126230), from 2017 I was able to continue my fieldwork focusing on local products — primarily pumpkin seed oil, its production, and its role in gastronomy and tourism. My fieldwork was carried out in the Órség region of Western Hungary and the Goričko region of Slovenia, where I interviewed local producers, oil mill owners, and entrepreneurs working in the hospitality industry. In 2018, I had the opportunity to participate in the annual pumpkin festival in Órség and to document the phenomenon. In 2019, as a participant observer I studied the community events held in Nagyrákos and Središče (Szerdahely) in connection with pumpkin seed shelling (hulling), which are becoming increasingly popular by the year. Our project obtained financial support to produce an ethnographical documentary film presenting the cultural aspects of pumpkin seed oil as a local product from the perspective of those who play an active role in its production and use, or in the organization and initiation of related events.²

In Hungary and Slovenia, as in other European countries, there is growing interest in local agricultural products, foodstuffs, and traditional foods — which is doubtless related to globalization and the expansion of large-scale agricultural production. According to some schools of thought, it is precisely these two latter factors that are responsible for the emergence of so-called industrial eaters, who are no longer aware of the origins of the food on their plates, or of the kind of technologies by which it was produced

² Anasztázia Gál, Maja Godina, Csaba Mészáros, and László Mód participated in the development of the concept. After visiting the potential locations, the film was shot with the help of a film crew between September 2019 and January 2020.

(GEYZENET et al. 2019:30). By contrast, a significant proportion of modern consumers are deeply concerned about the authenticity of their food and the path by which natural and healthy ingredients are obtained (GODINA 2017:384).

According to Maja Godina, pumpkin seed oil perfectly meets the criteria that are used to define intangible cultural heritage. These include, for example, high-level technological knowledge, use in regional gastronomy, and an association with particular beliefs and customs. In the course of her research, she has also highlighted how this agricultural product is gaining significance in terms of the strengthening and expression of ethnic and regional identities and the development of tourism. This statement is true particularly with respect to the Slovenian-nationality villages in Rábavidék (Slovensko Porabje), where pumpkin seed oil, both its production and its consumption, is regarded as one of the principal manifestations of their unique culture and traditions (GODINA 2017:384). It is particularly important in the various forms of sustainable tourism, which are based on local traditions and geographical peculiarities. In the Goričko Natural Park, pumpkin seed oil is promoted as a key element in the region's cuisine and cultural heritage.

From our perspective, the question of the heritagization of local foods can be regarded as an issue of particular significance, since pumpkin seed oil has undergone this process in both Slovenia and Hungary. Heritagization can be regarded as a kind method, or tool, with which we are able to represent and interpret the past from the perspective of present-day circumstances. It is important to emphasize that all elements of cultural heritage have undergone some kind of heritagization process. In the summarized findings of her research on Alpine cheeses, Grasseni notes that traditional food has been rediscovered and invented as a means of local development and as a vehicle for collective territorial identities, although at the same time, we should not ignore the tension that exists between traditional methods of production and sale and the demands of a globalized market.³ Gregory Ramshaw has drawn attention to the fact that foods can function as an embodiment of regional and national heritage, while at the same time playing a key role in the differentiation of localities, especially in the field of tourism (RAMSHAW 2016:62). According to researcher József Gagyí, heritage, and the question of approaches towards heritage, have also been reevaluated in the identity strategies of local communities due to the impact of tourism. This was due to their need to define and present themselves and their past, not least in order to be able to “commodify” them. If they had none before, they now needed to be able to present a unique past and a unique heritage (GAGYI 2004:50). In the present chapter, we must also briefly address the associations between cultural heritage and festivals.⁴ This particular issue has recently been explored in a dedicated volume of studies by specialists in the field, who, drawing on examples from Europe, chiefly sought to explain how forms of intangible cultural heritage are mobilized in the framework of so-called heritage festivals. We might interpret these events as tools by means of which the collective memory is shaped and our common European heritage

³ The rediscovery of alpine cheeses as cultural heritage was accompanied by a significant transformation in terms of their production, advertising, perception, and consumption. GRASSENİ 2011.

⁴ Eszter Kisbán published study of the different types of gastronomic festival in Hungary, and their popularization, in the conference proceedings “The Return of Traditional Food”, published in 2013 in Sweden. see: KISBÁN 2013:197–208.

is redefined. Due to the growing economic and sociocultural role of tourism, there are also experts who interpret heritage festivals as tourism events (KOCKEL et al. 2020:1–17). Festivals can be understood as the setting for practices associated with cultural heritage, where the “utilitarian interpretation” of local traditions, the canonization and branding of cultural elements, and, ultimately, heritagization take place.⁵

PUMPKIN CULTIVATION AND THE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF PUMPKIN SEED OIL IN THE SLOVENIAN-HUNGARIAN BORDERLAND

The pumpkin (*Cucurbita*) was brought by the Spanish from the Americas and spread throughout Europe, where, from its use in ornamental gardens, it eventually reached the common people. Due to its edible flesh and tasty seeds, it was considered a fairly popular food among German and Italian peasants as early as the 16th century, before rapidly gaining popularity in Northern and Central Europe. Its flavorful fruit, along with cultivation techniques that largely resembled those employed in the case of melons and cucumbers, greatly contributed to the rapid spread of the plant. It gained ground primarily as a food for humans, although later it began to play an important role as fodder for certain domestic animals. From the end of the 18th century, pumpkins were typically cultivated in Hungary as a companion crop for corn, and they continued to be grown in this unique cultivation system right up until the middle of the 20th century. In the Carpathian Basin, pumpkin seed oil production and consumption is closely linked primarily with South-Western Transdanubia and the Őrség, Hetés, and Göcsej ethnographical regions, although nowadays large-scale pumpkin cultivation is mainly located in the Great Hungarian Plain.⁶ According to Attila Selmeczi-Kovács, in terms of pumpkin seed oil consumption a clearly demarcated territorial area has emerged in Europe, in which the pumpkin has become the primary oleaginous plant, while elsewhere it plays only a complementary role alongside other oily seeds (flax, hemp, poppy, rape and sunflower).⁷

⁵ For details on this topic, see: Pusztai – Neill 2007.

⁶ According to data from the Central Statistical Office, in 2003 oil pumpkins were cultivated on almost 6,000 hectares of land in Hungary, and much of the crop was exported to England, Austria, the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland. For details of oil pumpkin production from a present-day perspective, see: MADAI-LAPIS 2016:67–82.

⁷ Pumpkins have also been grown as an oil crop in the northern, central, and eastern areas of Hungary, although cultivation in these areas is nowhere near as significant as in the regions adjacent to Styria. The Romanians in Southern Transylvania not only produced oil in order to supply their own needs, but in some villages, such as Silvașu de Jos (Alsószilvás) and Silvașu de Sus (Felsőszilvás), they also had plenty left over to sell. In the early 20th century, women from these two settlements often sold their products on the markets in Hațeg (Hátszeg), Hunedoara (Vajdahunyad), and Deva (Déva). On fast days, it was regarded as a very popular food among the Greek Catholics and Orthodox Romanians of Southern Transylvania (SELMECZI KOVÁCS 1993:177).

The first Hungarian data come not from our area of investigation, but from what is today the territory of Slovakia, and from Somogy County.⁸ In his monograph on popular nutrition in the Őrség region, László Kardos states that in the mid-19th century oil was not yet produced in the Szalafő area but was rather being pressed in Vendvidék (Slovensko Porabje). At the same time, he notes that rudimentary processes were carried out at the Kerka stream, including boiling the hulled, toasted, and crushed pumpkin seeds in water. The oil was subsequently skimmed off after cooling. Another process that he referred to as well known was to allow the water to evaporate entirely, leaving behind an oily fluid (KARDOS 1943:44). In relation to the settlement of Szalafő, Pável Ágoston mentions a relatively late date, the end of the 19th century, for the introduction of pumpkin seed oil. According to his data, it was a woman from Hodoš (Hodos), who, having married a man from Szalafő, first acquainted the locals with the secrets of pumpkin seed oil production and its possible uses in gastronomy (PÁVEL 1949:143). I think it unlikely that we will ever know for certain the date of the introduction of pumpkin seed oil in Western Hungary. We can only estimate, in light of the ethnographical descriptions quoted above, that it was through the mediation of the Slovenian-speaking communities living in the region that the local Hungarians became acquainted with this variety of oil. Even today, it is better known and more widespread in Slovenia and Austria than it is in Hungary. However, other channels of transmission cannot be ruled out, since settlements in the Őrség region maintained intensive trade relations with the Styrian capital, Graz, where large quantities of horned cattle were sold on the markets prior to the First World War.

In both the Goričko and Őrség regions, the cultivation of pumpkins and the production of pumpkin seed oil was carried out in a family context until the mid-20th century, mainly in order to meet individual needs. Some of the oil mills that still operate today in Prekmurje and Lower Styria were established back in the early 20th century, and the profession is typically perpetuated by members of the third and fourth generations. In the 1920s and 30s, as a result of an upturn in demand, some of the pumpkins were grown in Croatia and Serbia, while the oil that was pressed from them was supplied to Austria. This period also saw the first appearance of hydraulic presses obtained from Austria, thanks to which the oil could be pressed from the seeds more quickly and easily. In the territory of present-day Slovenia, oil production gained in significance after the Second World War in correlation with the increase in agricultural land. In the early 1980s, oil producers introduced a new variety of pumpkin (*buca slovenska golica*), which rapidly replaced the earlier varieties. In the same period, two new hybrids were created in Austria (*Wies371* and *Gleisdorf*), which produced good yields even during dry summers and which proved to be more suitable for mechanical harvesting. The seeds were easier to remove from the pumpkin flesh, thus the oil that was extracted from them was of better quality. The new varieties rapidly spread among farmers in Slovenia, too, who still prefer to cultivate them today (GODINA 2019:122).

⁸ In his overview of the history of the oil plant industry in Hungary, Mihály Horváth mentions the town of Galanta, situated on the territory of present-day Slovakia, where, between 1711 and 1780, large quantities of pumpkin seed oil were pressed for use in place of butter in foods consumed by the population during fasts. In the late 18th century, the botanist Antal Veszelszky reported that a pasta dish made with pumpkin seed oil was eaten in Túr, in Somogy County (HORVÁTH 1840:143).

In the second half of the 20th century, very similar, yet at the same time radically different tendencies emerged in the agricultural sector, which can partly be related to the differences in agrarian policy between Yugoslavia and Hungary.⁹ In both countries, specialization in pumpkin cultivation for the purposes of oil production emerged as a distinctive process. This change can clearly be traced back to the drastic suppression of the role of animal husbandry in family farming, since the utilization of pumpkins for animal fodder had become redundant. Farmers stopped harvesting pumpkins and stopped transporting them to their homes, instead leaving the produce in the fields, where, in the form of green manure, the plants now assumed a role in improving the nutritive value of poor soils.¹⁰ In both Hungary and Slovenia, pumpkins lost their association with other cultivated crops, which meant that they were grown in a monoculture system rather than as a companion crop for corn or potatoes. Today, the proportion of plots sown with pumpkins has fallen dramatically in the Órség region: pumpkins are grown chiefly in gardens next to dwellings, strictly to meet personal needs. Larger plots are cultivated mainly by Austrian agricultural entrepreneurs, who transport the harvested pumpkins back to Austria, where the oil that is pressed from them is undoubtedly marketed as a Styrian product. In Slovenia, in contrast to the situation in Hungary, pumpkin cultivation continues to represent a significant branch of agriculture even today: in the Slovenian-Hungarian-Austrian tri-border area, the amount of cultivated land reaches a total of 1,000 hectares. In late autumn, the plots used for growing pumpkins, where farmers arrange the pumpkins in rows by machine before harvesting, are a distinctive feature of the cultural landscape. Pumpkins are still grown today on small-scale farms, although in certain settlements, such as Domanjševci (Domonkosfa) for example, their cultivation has been significantly reduced.

Surprisingly, the Socialist transformation of agriculture in Hungary did not lead to radical changes in terms of pumpkin production: in fact, kolkhoz-style agricultural cooperatives and specialist cooperatives set up oil-pressing facilities where members could press oil from pumpkins grown on land that was set aside for their own use. This activity even produced revenue for the cooperatives, since oil pressing was carried out in the form of contract work. There are even examples of the cooperatives themselves experimenting with growing pumpkins on larger plots of land and producing pumpkin seed oil, which they sold in Szentgotthárd and Szombathely or at the *Órség Days* festival. These initiatives were partly connected with the activities of certain civil society

⁹ In settlements in Goričko with a Hungarian and Slovenian population, during the Socialist era families were permitted to have 10 hectares of land for their own use, which meant that small-scale farms could continue to operate. Likewise significant was the fact that, from the 1960s and 1970s, Yugoslav citizens had the opportunity to travel as guest workers to Austria and West Germany, from where they not only brought new experiences, but also devoted a proportion of the money they earned to the modernization of their family farms and to the purchasing of the latest agricultural implements. In the 1960s, alongside the state farm in Szentgotthárd, agricultural cooperatives were established in the Rába valley and part of the Órség region. By contrast, due to the Vendvidék's unsuitability for large-scale production, only specialist cooperatives could operate there, the members of which continued to be engaged in private farming as well. In most of the Órség region, the plots were ploughed together and large blocks of land were created in the interests of more efficient cultivation. For more on this topic, see: ISPÁN 2019:78–83.

¹⁰ The development of new varieties also moved in this direction, since the production of bigger quantities of seeds compared to smaller crop sizes became a primary consideration.

organizations (e.g. the Friends of Órség), which, as early as the 1980s, were making efforts to promote pumpkin seed oil as a local product typical of the Órség region and to popularize it among tourists visiting the area.¹¹

Nowadays, the national parks operating in the Slovenian-Hungarian borderland are making efforts to do precisely the same thing, since shaping the area's regional heritage and supporting sustainable agriculture are in their fundamental interests. Besides the natural heritage, elements of the cultural heritage are also important attractions in terms of eco-tourism, which is beginning to play a growing role in this region as well. The Órség National Park has established a brand, with the aim of supporting local farmers who work land lying in areas that have been designated as protected zones and to facilitate the marketing of their products (BARANYAI 2012:135–136). Pumpkin seed oil producers have been awarded the right to use this branding on two occasions. In the past few decades in Hungary, as a result of intensive heritage conservation efforts coordinated and regulated by the state, “Órség pumpkin seed oil,” along with the tradition of pumpkin seed hulling, have been added to the list of national values. The related criteria are defined in an official description, which links these values to a concrete geographical area. This means that, in the heritagization process, the product has also become subject to standardization. Producers operating outside this geographical area would be perfectly justified in asking why Órség features as the geographical reference, when pumpkin seed oil is likewise regarded as a popular food in the Göcsej and Hetés regions of Zala County, and in the settlements of Rábavidék (Porabje). Even today, there are entrepreneurs who are involved in oil production in these areas on a fairly significant scale. Another interesting feature of the product description is the fact that the determination of the geographical location applies exclusively to the place where the product is processed, and not to the origin of the raw material. In practice, this means that oil producers can grow pumpkin seeds, or have them grown, in any other part of the country.¹² In all probability, the opportunity this offers is similarly exploited by businesses specializing in the production of pumpkin seed oil, which are thus able to obtain their raw material more cheaply than if they had to grow the pumpkins themselves in the territory of the national park, where they would obviously be obliged to conform to strict regulations.

Pumpkin seed oil, which has become known throughout the country as “Órség gold,” currently guarantees a partial livelihood to a few specialist farms, which, besides the manufacturing and sale of their products, are also involved in demonstrating their oil pressing equipment and oil production techniques to tourists. On one local family farm, the oil press essentially functions as an open workshop, where interested visitors can learn about the most important steps in the process. These businesses would be unable to make a living from pumpkin seed oil production and sales alone, thus they have been obliged to create a unique and diversified approach, which, in many cases, includes producing other varieties of oil and other local products. Thus oils pressed from walnuts, grape seeds, poppy seeds, hazelnuts, sea buckthorn, hemp seeds, and apricot kernels have appeared alongside pumpkin seed oil in recent years. The seed residue that remains

¹¹ There was also sufficient pumpkin seed oil to export, despite the fact that one Hungarian pharmaceutical factory was also purchasing oil for the preparation of its medicinal products.

¹² https://gi.kormany.hu/download/0/37/42000/%C5%90rs%C3%A9gi%20t%C3%B6kmagolaj%20k%C3%A9relem_honlapra.pdf (last accessed 2021. 01.21.)

after the oil has been pressed is ground and sold in the form of flour or seed cakes, which can be used for both culinary and medicinal purposes. These new forms of utilization are extremely widespread in Slovenia, too, where pumpkin seed oil liqueur, bonbons, and various types of cakes are produced, adding variety to the range of local products offered to tourists. According to Maja Godina, with its close connection to the tourist industry in the Goričko region, pumpkin seed oil represents an important economic resource, besides the fact that it can be regarded as a cultural feature, by means of which a peripheral region is able to achieve a symbolic equality, importance, and centrality (GODINA 2019:131–132).

In the Slovenian-Hungarian borderland, pumpkin seed oil is an integral part of the daily diet even today. It is regularly consumed by locals throughout the year, not just during particular celebrations. Those unable to produce their own oil for some reason will purchase it from oil mills or grocery shops, or obtain it from families who are left with a surplus after meeting their own needs. It is regularly to be found among the condiments on restaurant tables in the borderland, which aptly illustrates its role in local gastronomy. In Hungary, too — similar to the phenomena described by Maja Godina — pumpkin seed oil is used not only as a flavoring and accompaniment for salads and vegetables, but as an ingredient in soups, ice cream, cakes, chocolate, and liqueurs. Besides its traditional uses, it is a very versatile ingredient in modern gastronomy, where every effort is made to exploit to the full its hidden potential (GODINA 2019:130–131). These new techniques for its utilization mainly serve the interests of tourism, and the majority of products made using pumpkin seed oil tend to be popular among tourists visiting the area.

FORMS OF WORK RELATED TO PUMPKIN SEED SHELLING

The hulling of substantial quantities of seeds is important from the point of view of the quantity of oil extracted, although today, due to the extensive spread of naked-seeded, or hullless, pumpkin varieties,¹³ the procedure has become entirely redundant. These new varieties first appeared in Styria, from where they spread rapidly in many directions. Instead of a hard, lignified shell, the seeds are encased in a thin, dark-green membrane, which gives them the impression of being hullless (BERÉNYI 2014:5).

Before the spread of these new pumpkin varieties, the shells had to be removed from the seeds — a process that is uniformly referred to by Hungarians in South-Western Transdanubia as *köpesztés*, while the Slovenians refer to it as *a koškice lupajo* (MUKICSNÉ KOZÁR 1997:24).

In Hungary, several researchers have already studied the organization and role of tasks performed in the community and have attempted to classify and group them. In Hungarian ethnographical research, the expression “communal work” is used to refer to forms of work organization that are established in order to complete tasks more quickly and efficiently, and which are based on the equal ranking of participants and their readiness to help one another. Greater efficiency was by no means the exclusive goal of these activities, which were rather carried out as a form of recreation, and even as occasions for

¹³ According to some, these varieties emerged as the result of a spontaneous mutation, although others believe that changes were caused by a recessive gene.

the transmission of knowledge, although they also contributed to the strengthening and ongoing maintenance of a sense of community. Thus, in part, the emphasis of so-called communal work was not in fact on making the work easier or faster, but on the cultural and/or ritual activities that were part of community life.¹⁴ According to László Szabó, such organized labor was based on blood, friendship, local, economic, and human relationships between members of the community, and in each case their systematization is peculiar to the examined community. While performing the work, it was usually families rather than individuals that were brought into contact with one another (SZABÓ 1967:224).

Pumpkin seed hulling typically took place in the evening, after dinner, when the members of the family had completed their daily tasks. On bigger peasant farms, where significant quantities of pumpkins were grown, relatives and neighbors would join in and help with the work on winter evenings.¹⁵ The seeds were boiled or soaked the previous evening to soften the hulls, which could then be removed using various methods, including fingers, teeth, or knives. Only the amount of seeds that could be processed in one evening were soaked, since the seeds would deteriorate rapidly once damp. In the 1970s and 1980s, articles written in various genres were regularly published in both the local and national press, in which the production of pumpkin seed oil and the associated forms of labor were presented as a local cultural feature, or as some kind of exoticism. These articles described not only the pressing process, but also the hulling of the pumpkin seeds.¹⁶ In one of our research sites, Središče, the men would relax by playing cards once the work had been completed. The tables would be spread with foods typical of the occasion, such as bread and dripping (made from boiled bacon), brawn, and bread with pork crackling. During the pumpkin seed hulling, ex-servicemen would recount their wartime experiences, while locals employed in seasonal agricultural work in Bácska and Baranya would share newly learnt folk songs with other members of the community. In Središče, pumpkin seed hulling also played an important role in matchmaking, providing as it did an excellent opportunity for youngsters to become acquainted. In our other research site, Nagyrákos, once the work was finished the participants would be toasted — that is, they would be offered sweet pretzel pastries served with dried fruits soaked in water, the juice of which would also be drunk.

Ethnographical descriptions, press reports, and data gathered in the course of fieldwork would clearly appear to support the idea that hulling was communal work, established essentially out of economic necessity but which also fulfilled other functions (entertainment, knowledge exchange, matchmaking, etc.) in the given community. Its disappearance can clearly be linked to the introduction and spread of the new, hullless pumpkin varieties, since

¹⁴ For more on this topic, see: SZENDREY 1929:273–286; FÉL 1940:361–381; SZABÓ 1967:219–237; SZILÁGYI 2000:570–571.

¹⁵ Depending on the size of the harvest, the quantity of seeds hulled each year in the Őrség varied, which might mean between 2 and 10 kg in a poorer family, and as much as 15 to 40 kg in a more well-to-do family. The seed cases left behind after the hulling were put on the compost heap or burned. They were not used as fodder, as the horned cattle would become bloated.

¹⁶ *Vas Népe* [daily newspaper published in Vas County], January 21, 1971:3.

the task of removing the seeds from their shells subsequently became entirely redundant.¹⁷ As communal tasks, pumpkin seed shelling and feather stripping¹⁸ were interlinked and represented a division of labor between the sexes. While the men hulled the pumpkin seeds, the women would be busy stripping feathers.

NAGYRÁKOS CASE STUDY

The village of Nagyrákos lies on the river Zala, not far from Óriszentpéter, which is currently the only settlement in the Órség region with the rank of town. Its barely 250 inhabitants belong to the Reformed and Catholic denominations. The settlement structure is typical of the Órség region: the village is divided into five hamlets, which even today differ distinctly from one another. Owing to the adverse soil conditions, the inhabitants of the settlement formerly made a living primarily from animal husbandry, although silviculture was also significant (SZABÓ 2005:286). In terms of transportation, there are relatively good links with other settlements in the region since a new rail line was introduced in the early 2000s, which provides connections with Budapest, Zalaegerszeg, and Slovenia. In 2001, a railway viaduct was built, spanning the valley of the river Zala and dramatically changing the appearance of the village. Named after the new construction, the “Völgyhíd (Viaduct) Fair” has been held annually since 2001. Alongside musical and cultural programs, visitors can browse among stalls selling various handicrafts. The event is growing in popularity among tourists who spend their summer vacations in the Órség region, and the number of visitors is increasing annually. Many of the families living in the village are making efforts to capitalize on the potential benefits offered by tourism. Some families have opted to focus on hospitality and regularly rent out accommodation to tourists visiting the Órség area. Others specialize in various local products (cheeses, jams, and cordials), or sell vegetables grown in their own gardens, either locally or at the produce market in Óriszentpéter.¹⁹

One of the biggest tourist attractions in Nagyrákos is the ensemble of traditional buildings constructed in 2008 in the center of the village, which includes a wooden house thatched with rye-straw in traditional Órség style, agricultural buildings, and a blacksmith's workshop.²⁰ The traditional house and its surroundings provide a setting for numerous events, the most significant of them being the handicraft fair that takes place

¹⁷ Pumpkin seeds with hulls did not disappear entirely from the Slovene–Hungarian borderland, since even today there are families that cultivate them, despite the manual labor required for their processing. These families are convinced that the oil pressed from the older varieties is of better quality than that obtained from the hullless pumpkins. Quite recently, the newspaper *Vas népe* wrote about a family that regularly organized communal work for the hulling of pumpkin seeds. *Vas Népe*, January 5, 2018: 7.

¹⁸ When the down is stripped from the feather shaft with a deft movement for use in stuffing pillows.

¹⁹ The market was officially opened in the autumn of 2012 in the framework of the pumpkin festival and has subsequently enjoyed increasing popularity among producers as well as buyers. With its ever-expanding range, it has turned into a kind of independent tourist product itself.

²⁰ The original building was burned down in the 1980s and had to be rebuilt almost entirely by the local government. The renovation and equipping of the blacksmith's workshop took place in the framework of cooperation with the Órség National Park.

at the end of July, and the pumpkin festival. In one of the rooms, temporary exhibitions are regularly organized in connection with the different events, offering an introduction to various themes. During the festivals, demonstrations are organized in the blacksmith's workshop, giving tourists an opportunity to gain an insight into the mysteries of the blacksmith's profession.

At the initiative of the local council, communal pumpkin hulling was first organized in 2008 in the framework of the Őrség International Pumpkin Festival. This first occasion attracted around 20 participants, and the number has been steadily rising each year. In the third year, interest proved so great that there was no room for all the participants in the village house and the event had to be moved to the local cultural center. In 2017, the number of participants approached 120, including many who return to the village annually to take part in the communal pumpkin seed hulling. Within a few years, the spatial structure of the event had been established, basically comprising two locations — the village house as well as the village's cultural center. At the end of September, the organizers decorate the area surrounding the folk building complex with pumpkins to promote the forthcoming festival.

The program begins at the village house in the late afternoon, where participants are introduced to the work of the blacksmith and the tools used in the forge, while in another of the rooms, the building also houses a temporary exhibition. Following a welcome speech delivered by the village mayor, those attending the festival move on to the cultural center, where the organizers place a pile of pumpkin seeds in front of each participant before the communal work begins. Some years, the festival program also includes cultural productions (choral performances) or book presentations. A significant number of the participants are tourists who visit the village each year at the end of September specifically to attend the Őrség International Pumpkin Festival.²¹ In particular, they are drawn by the unique experience and by the opportunity for recreation. Others, mainly local people belonging to the older generations, are attracted to the event through a sense of nostalgia. Some of them return every year, drawn by a desire to take part every now and again in "communal work." Nagyrákos is one of the settlements that play an active role in the organization of the pumpkin festival. The pumpkin seed hulling, which takes place on the Friday, can properly be regarded as the "overture" to the series of programs that are mainly linked to Őriszentpéter and Szalafő, settlements that tend to be more popular among tourists.

²¹ The first festival was organized in the middle of October 2004 by Régiófókus Kht., a company specializing in regional development, with significant financial support from a project implemented in the Slovenian-Hungarian borderland in the framework of the PHARE program. The organizers drew up a complex set of objectives in relation to the event, including the expansion of tourism opportunities in the region, the lengthening of the tourist season, and the creation of opportunities to present the traditions of this geographical area and the artistic activities taking place there. The year 2004 also saw the launch of a market organizational process, the aim of which was to coordinate the activities of companies involved in the cultivation and processing of pumpkins. Since 2004, the festival has become one of the most important tourist attractions in the Őrség region and is now hugely popular among tourists. It has also become a significant source of income for actors in the local tourism sector, not to mention the artisans and local farmers who sell a substantial quantity of their products and produce at the craft markets and farmers' markets. In my opinion, one of the reasons for this success lies in the fact that the organizers have created an extremely complex cultural product in which the multifaceted natural and cultural heritage of the region is presented to tourists. On the first festival, see: *Vas Népe* [daily newspaper published in Vas County], August 16, 2004: 6.

Rather than a civil society organization, it is the local council that has chosen to play an active, initiating role in the heritagization process, in the person of its current chair, the mayor of the village — a woman who is not only a politician but also an agricultural entrepreneur involved in cattle farming, milk production, and the manufacturing of dairy products, and, last but not least, an expert storyteller.²² She typically refers to herself not as a politician or as a local producer, but simply as a “peasant woman” who has the important task of presenting the values of a vanished peasant culture and passing them on to the younger generation. This is what prompted her to organize the first seed hulling event in 2008 — since, as she saw it, the pumpkin festival was failing to present the true diversity of the connections between the plant and the population, and the traditions associated with pumpkin processing. Essentially, she created and established a cultural performance²³ in which she herself is the central character and actor. If she considers it appropriate, she encourages the participants to sing, or she entertains the group with stories. Since a significant number of the participants are tourists, the mayor acquaints them with the traditions associated with pumpkin cultivation and processing, and introduces them to the tricks of pumpkin seed shelling. She introduces the old varieties of pumpkin, which have seeds in shells, as well as the new, hullless varieties, while outlining their most important characteristics. One particularly striking moment during the evening is when she cuts open a pumpkin using a hatchet or coppice knife, before explaining to participants the various possible methods that can be used to remove the seeds from the flesh. She interprets the change in pumpkin variety, and the introduction of the new, hullless varieties, from an individual perspective, describing how their spread is clearly correlated with the disappearance and disintegration of the small village communities that were once based on cooperative work. Essentially, the mayor personally combines the roles of heritage creator and heritage manager, transforming tradition into cultural heritage by means of education. She is permanently engaged in and “protecting” the economic/touristic utilization, promotion, and management of heritage, making possible the authentic transmission of traditions to outsiders.²⁴ One of the most striking manifestations of the economic utilization of heritage is the participation of local producers, who, following the pumpkin seed hulling and the serving of dinner, offer visitors various products, including jams, fruit cordials, dried fruits, dairy products, and of course pumpkin seed oil. Thus, besides sales made at the market, via the Internet, or from the producers’ own homes, the local pumpkin festival program is an important setting in which significant numbers of tourists come specifically to buy locally made products. In relation to the economic utilization of cultural heritage, it is important to bear in mind a second aspect — that is, the local entrepreneurs affected by village tourism, who, with the increased demand during the pumpkin festival, find themselves unable to offer additional accommodation.

²² She has received numerous awards for her various community-building activities, among which the title of Knight of Hungarian Culture deserves particular mention.

²³ In the view of Simon McKerrell and Kerstin Pfeiffer, intangible cultural heritage performances can be understood as a kind of act of communication, which support the formulation and reformulation of different forms of identity, locations, and sense of belonging. With each performance, the participants, performers, and audience together create new or different meanings. MCKERRELL – PFEIFFER 2020:26.

²⁴ On those taking part in heritagization and practices connected with cultural heritage, see: JAKAB – VAJDA 2018:18–19.

SREDIŠČE CASE STUDY

The settlement lies directly on the Slovenian-Hungarian state border and belongs administratively to the municipality (*občina*) of Moravske Toplice. The population of the village fell dramatically in the 20th century and today scarcely reaches 60 inhabitants, the majority of whom belong to the Reformed and Lutheran denominations. These negative demographic trends are clearly related to the village's peripheral geographical location and its unfavorable transportation connections, which have prompted the majority of inhabitants to move away from their earlier homes. Some local families are still involved in agriculture, although others commute daily, usually to Murska Sobota (Muraszombat). Središče was among the settlements in the Velemér, or "Zürich" valley, where, before the First World War, pottery was an important industry.²⁵ At one time, there were 12 artisans in the village employed in the profession, although none of them remain today, thus the pottery trade has disappeared entirely (Kós 1986:388).

The Ferenc Antal Association for the Preservation of Tradition and Culture, founded on January 23, 1999, takes its name from the master potter who had a workshop in the settlement until 1960. The association, which had a total of 29 members in 2015, aims to pursue a quite diverse range of activities. Originally, it organized musical instrument (recorder and violin) tuition for youngsters, at the same time supporting amateur theatrical performances. Today, the village population has shrunk so dramatically that the association is no longer able to run a dance group or a choir. Its activities are focused mainly on the organization of various cultural events, which, besides pumpkin seed hulling and feather stripping, notably include the erecting of a maypole, a St. George's Day hike, and reunions for natives of the settlement.

Pumpkin seed hulling and feather stripping were first organized in Središče in 2000, on the first anniversary of the founding of the local cultural association. To mark the occasion, a temporary exhibition was organized in the cultural center, where the event took place, comprising ethnographical objects collected in the village, which were displayed in the setting of a peasant-style interior. What was it that motivated the association? In an interview, the current chair of the association emphasized how, following the appearance of hullless pumpkin varieties 20 to 30 years earlier, the aim of the association was to revive a "lost tradition." In this case, "heritage construction" involved a civil society organization, which even today remains the principal actor and initiator of practices associated with the local cultural heritage.²⁶ The first occasion proved so successful and popular that the organizers have staged the event almost every year since, on the last weekend of January in the local cultural center. The number of participants far exceeds the population of the village: as many as 100 to 150 people attend the event, which I believe perfectly illustrates its popularity. Almost every year, various Hungarian settlements in the Prekmurje region, from Lendava to Hodoš, are represented

²⁵ For details on this, see Kós 1944:118–131; 1986:388–421; NAGY 1999:237–244.

²⁶ From a distance of 20 years, it seems an impossible undertaking to reconstruct the precise circumstances and to establish which member of the association it was who suggested the shaping of tradition into cultural heritage, or which decisions influenced the selection process. The civil society organization also attempted to revive the local pottery tradition, although its efforts came to nothing, for a number of reasons.

at the pumpkin seed hulling through local leaders or associations. In addition, Hungarian politicians from Slovenia also regularly attend, as we ourselves were able to verify during the research we carried out in 2020. Visitors from Hungary mainly come from the neighboring settlements across the border, who otherwise cultivate close ties with the organizers. They typically take part in each other's events, and on some occasions events are organized jointly, including the maypole celebrations, for example. Most of the participants are seated at tables, and the organizers present them with pumpkin seeds that have been soaked overnight to make them easier to hull. The seeds are supplied by a local family that runs an agricultural business: they grow a variety of pumpkin with seeds that have shells specifically for use at this event. Once the work has been completed, the hulled pumpkin seeds are collected and oil is pressed from them at a nearby oil mill. At another table, deft-fingered women share their feather stripping techniques. In the case of both activities, members of the older generation are delighted to pass on their knowledge to youngsters, who are given the opportunity to master skills that form part of this unique heritage. Once the work is over, the hulled pumpkin seeds, shells, and feathers are cleared from the tables and the participants share a dinner comprising homemade cakes, sweet breads, and soft pretzels, along with brawn served with onions and pumpkin seed oil. These foods are also on display on a table in the cultural center. Although the association does not organize any special cultural programs for the event, music for listening to, singing to, and dancing to late into the night is provided by a musician who conjures up the requisite atmosphere with a synthesizer and harmonica.

SUMMARY

The present study examines the heritagization processes associated with pumpkin seed oil, a product typical of the Slovenian-Hungarian borderland, that have evolved since the 2000s in a settlement in the Őrség region of Hungary and a settlement in the Slovenian Goričko region. It explores the ways in which innovations — in our case the introduction and spread of new varieties of pumpkin — have transformed processing technologies, and the impact that this has had on the culture of the local communities. Ultimately, the cultivation of hullless pumpkin seeds made redundant the performance of an extremely labor-intensive activity by simplifying this stage of the processing. Seasonal agricultural cooperation came to an end in the 1980s when the new varieties of pumpkin became widespread in agricultural production. The processes explored in the present study could have taken place almost anywhere in the borderland region, since people in almost every settlement were/are employed in pumpkin seed oil production. Other experiments with heritagization were made, although for one reason or another these initiatives were halted and failed to develop in the way they did in Nagyrákos and Središče. Both these examples can be regarded as success stories in their own way, since the examined communities were able to take possession of and “appropriate” this aspect of their traditional culture — by connecting and associating it with their own localities — in advance of other settlements in the same region. Today, there can be no doubt that these two settlements have “earned the right” to be permanent representatives of this unique cultural heritage and to exploit the potential it offers. In both cases, heritagization is taking place at local level, at the initiative of, and controlled by, members of the local population, rather than

experts or institutions from outside the given community.²⁷ In Hungary, the local council in Nagyrákos is behind the initiative, while in the village of Središče in Slovenia, the initiative is promoted by a civil society organization. According to the councilors and civil society representatives, from among the various tasks associated with pumpkin cultivation and the production of pumpkin seed oil, it is pumpkin seed hulling that is most appropriate for the construction of cultural heritage that best represents their respective communities towards the outside world. The choice of this particular phase of the work is no coincidence, since the various forms of agricultural cooperation that existed prior to the spread of hullless pumpkin varieties fulfilled a wide range of functions (entertainment, knowledge transmission) in the given community, while the organization of the work did not demand any complex preparation.²⁸ It lent itself ideally to transformation into a community event accessible to a wider public. Despite the similarities, the two examples of heritagization have followed an entirely different path and fulfil different functions in the examined settlements. It is important to emphasize that the initiators of the events were able to rely on local community memory, since almost all of them had participated in this kind of agricultural cooperation in the 1970s and 1980s. This is important to stress, since in neither case can we talk about the initiators constructing a cultural heritage in order to substitute either tradition or memory. In Središče, as the outcome of its heritagization efforts, the civil society organization established a local festival, which, at the end of January each year, provides an opportunity for this dwindling, marginalized population to “make visible” and symbolically strengthen its cultural connections on both sides of the border. Besides, it is also important to point out that they have established an extremely significant opportunity for recreation, making it possible for the members of different generations to enjoy shared leisure time in the framework of music and dance. The Hungarian example involves some rather more complex phenomena, since in this case heritagization was accomplished in the framework of tourism, with the express intention of popularizing the settlement as the setting for a festival that would attract increasing numbers of visitors. Similar to examples in Romania (Transylvania), in this case it appears that the local actors envisage the concepts and practices of heritagization and tourism as being organically interwoven — that is, they regard heritage and tourism as inseparable. We might also say that, with pumpkin seed hulling, they have created a cultural product that can be commodified and sold to tourists in the framework of tourism (SZABÓ 2018:126). Ultimately, the initiators of the heritagization efforts were guided by a desire to help the settlement out of its marginalized situation and, similarly to the region’s main tourist destinations (Óriszentpéter, Szalafő), to make the location attractive to tourists — that is, to help local producers and businesses to benefit more intensively from the economic potential of tourism.

²⁷ For an overview of the sites connected with cultural heritage, see: JAKAB – VAJDA 2018:19–20.

²⁸ A second location for cooperation related to the processing of pumpkin seeds was the oil works, where the various operations (grinding, kneading, toasting) were carried out jointly by families that helped each other in the pressing of the oil. This communal work did not become part of the cultural heritage, nor was it suitable as a focus for the organization of events similar to pumpkin seed hulling. Demonstrations of certain oil production processes are given nowadays during festivals either by the organizers or by enterprises specializing in oil production, although there are also examples in Hungary of “open works,” where visitors can learn about the different stages of oil processing.

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